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ABSTRACT

Through state-supported day care programs for employees' children, incentives for industry-supported programs, and careful review of the regulation of child care providers, states are beginning to meet the growing demand for quality child care facilities. In 1984, 34 states considered or adopted changes in policies regulating day care providers. At least six states set up commissions to review day care regulations: Connecticut, Indiana, Maine, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia. At least 15 states require or are considering criminal record checks of day care center employees. Several states have developed programs for school-age child care, and at least six states have tax incentives for businesses providing child care services to employees. Three states (New York, New Jersey, and California) support day care programs for their employees. Finally, Connecticut is considering two grant programs to establish day care programs for state agencies and nonprofit organizations. (RH)

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CARING FOR OUR CHILDREN: DAY CARE ISSUES FACING THE STATES

Introduction

The post-World War II baby boomers are creating a new boom of their own. The number of children under 10 is growing for the first time since 1954.[1] In the 1950s, mommy usually stayed home to care for her boomer. But her daughter has grown up and now holds down a full-time job outside the home in addition to her role as a mother. About 8.5 million working women -- 5 million more than in 1960 -- are mothers of children under six years old.[2] Children from 26.1 million families have two working parents.[3] All this adds up to a heavy demand for day care for pre-school children and after-school programs for school-age children.

Controversies over abuse in day care centers and the demand for employer support of child care has focused attention on state initiatives in four major areas:

- Regulation of child care providers.
- Creation of school-age child care programs.
- Incentives for corporate support of day care.
- Support of state employee child care programs.

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History of the Federal Role in Day Care

During World War II, Congress passed the Lanham Act, providing funds to the states for the children of women working in war-time industries. The program ended with the war since women were expected to return home as their husbands returned to work. In the 1960s and 1970s, government viewed day care primarily as a service for welfare mothers. From 1965 to 1982, day care

*This CSG Backgrounder was compiled by Shery S. Kearney, Information Specialist, States Information Center.

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expenditures by federal, state and local governments grew from $12.3 million to $3.0 billion.[4] However, increased spending on day care has slowed in the past few years as President Ronald Reagan has recommended social service budget cuts. In 1983, the Children's Defense Fund surveyed state child care officials and found that reduced federal spending for day care in 1981 triggered program cuts in 32 states and that 25 states were spending less on day care programs in 1984 than in 1981.[5] Much of the federal money spent on day care comes from the Social Security Act of 1974 which established the Title XX social services program. Under this program, states are entitled to receive a share of $2.6 billion in fiscal 1985 and $2.7 billion in fiscal 1986.[6]

In recent months, federal interest in day care has broadened. The House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families issued a report in October calling for:

- Cooperation of parents, government and the private sector in establishing a comprehensive child care system for the country.
- Revision of the federal tax policy to ensure that families are not penalized whether their children stay home or are cared for at an outside facility.
- Congress to require states to establish licensing and enforcement standards for child care in order to receive federal subsidies.
- Tax incentives to encourage employers to provide day care services as employee benefits.
- Increased federal subsidies for child care.
- Support of after-school programs for school-age or "latchkey" children.[7]

In September, U.S. Senators Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY) and Paula Hawkins (R-FL) introduced the National Child Protection Act to establish a national licensing program for child care providers, a clearinghouse for criminal records of day care center employees and a hotline for reporting of abuse of children receiving day care services. The bill died with the end of the session; however, similar measures were included in the stop-gap appropriations bill signed by President Reagan October 12 (HJ Res 648 -- PL 98-473). The provisions of the law:

- Allocated an extra $25 million for Title XX in fiscal 1985 to be used for training of child care providers, parents, licensing and enforcement officials to spot and prevent cases of child abuse in day care facilities.
- Required the states to use the money to supplement funds already being spent on training programs.
- Directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services to draft standards for day care centers in the areas of staff training, evaluation, staff-child ratios, employee background checks and parent visitation. The guidelines, expected to be released in January, will be recommended to the states, but their adoption will not be mandatory.

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- Required states receiving the additional money to establish by September 30, 1985, laws requiring a nationwide check of criminal records and procedures for reviewing backgrounds and employment history of both child care workers and juvenile correction and detention facility employees. Those states which do not comply must repay half the training money by having future allotments reduced.

- Authorized matching grants to states which have established trust funds for child abuse prevention programs. The grants will be limited to 25 percent of money a state spent in the previous year for child abuse prevention or an amount equaling 50 cents per child, whichever is less.[8]

By extending the Head Start program (S 2565), Congress authorized $20 million for grants to organizations to provide information and referrals about child care services and to establish programs in community centers and unused school buildings for latchkey children. In 1985, the legislation must be reintroduced in Congress as an appropriations bill.[9]

While these federal actions will spur further action in the states, many states have already begun efforts to improve the availability and quality of child care programs.

Issues Facing the States

Regulation of Child Care Providers

In 1984, 34 states considered or adopted changes in policies regulating day care providers.[10] Some state laws provide comprehensive rules for the operation of day care centers and babysitting services. Other states provide only that a licensed center shall comply with any regulation from the state department of social services. Day care businesses which are licensed by a state must comply with standards that affect various aspects of the child care environment. Common standards include: fire and health codes; limits on the number of children that can be cared for by the center; minimum requirements for providing food and clothing; limits on the amount of discipline that can be imposed on an unruly child; and adequacy of programs to educate or entertain the clients of child care services.

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1980 required the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to conduct a survey of states' practices for the regulation of day care centers. Among its findings:

- 24 of the 47 reporting states had no group size requirements, but actual sizes were smaller than HHS recommendations.

- Staff-child ratios were higher than recommended for 3-year-olds and older, but lower than recommended for those under 3.

- Half the states required centers to provide staff training.[11]

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At least six states set up commissions to review day care regulations in 1984: Connecticut, Indiana, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Virginia. Changes in licensing regulations have ranged from eliminating 24-hour inspection notices in South Carolina to reduced staff-child ratios in Arizona and Nevada. Colorado has eliminated corporal punishment from day care centers. [12]

The recent rash of reported cases of abuse in day care centers has focused attention on regulations designed to minimize the chance that pedophiles will be able to abuse children under their care. Most recent state action has centered on developing better methods of screening day care center employees. At least 15 states require or are considering criminal record checks of day care center employees. Some examples:

- The South Carolina Department of Social Services in 1984 instituted a policy of checking criminal records of applicants for day care licenses. In the past, applicants were required only to submit names of three references. Under the new policy a license is denied to anyone who has been convicted of child abuse, neglect or a violent crime.

- Iowa prohibits the hiring of day care workers who have been convicted of violent crimes and prohibits a person from living in a group or family facility if the person was convicted of such a crime or has a record of substantiated child abuse.

- New York checks the names of all day care personnel, both veterans and new employees, against the State Central Register of Child Abuse, a computerized data base of all reports of child abuse in the state. The data base contains records of arrests and convictions for child abuse and other violent crimes and any reports of child abuse confirmed by a district office of the Department of Social Services within 90 days of its occurrence. A person who has been wrongfully accused of child abuse may appeal to have his or her name removed from the record.

- Colorado and Texas also require day care centers to sign a pledge to make background checks of each staff member. Failure to do so may result in revocation of the license.

- New Hampshire requires all adults who live in houses which serve as home day care centers for three or more children to register with the Department of Health and Welfare and consent to background checks.

- At least two states -- California and Georgia -- have required employees of day care centers to be fingerprinted to facilitate screening of criminal records. (In California, West's California Health and Safety Code, Sec. 1597.54 and 1597.59. In Georgia, Ga. L. 1984 p. 1397, Sec. 49-5-60 through 49-5-74.)

- Other states which are considering or have implemented record checks: Florida, Wisconsin, Missouri, Hawaii, Kansas and North Dakota.[13]

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Funding of State Subsidized Child Care Programs

Most day care programs meet the needs of pre-school age children but rarely address the needs of latchkey children -- those over the age of six who go to school during the day and come home to empty houses after school. Some of the problems facing latchkey children include high accidental death rates, overwhelming feelings of loneliness and fear and greater chance of delinquency.[14] Extended school day care has been one effective method of helping latchkey children. (For more information see "When Nobody's Home: Programs to Help the Latch Key Child," CSG Backgrounder 108202.)

The Wellesley College School-Age Child Care Project recognizes four areas of action in the states: information gathering; information sharing and education; project development and technical assistance; and legislative initiatives. In the states where programs have developed, support from the governors has been a key component.[15]

In July, Governor Mario Cuomo of New York authorized the state to spend $300,000 to establish 30 or more programs for school-age child care. Under the plan, the state will consider proposals from government and non-profit organizations with preference given to programs in areas which are underserved. Programs are encouraged to use school buildings and involve parents.[16]

The California Legislature passed a $30 million package introduced by Senator David Roberti, President Pro Tempore, to provide extended day care services; however, Governor George Deukmejian vetoed the legislation, instead, appointing a task force to study alternative forms of day care.[17]

Wisconsin's Office of Children, Youth and Families will operate beginning in January three model programs for after-school care using a $77,800 federal grant. One program will use school facilities while another will be community-based providing check-in services for older children. The third program will train older children to take care of themselves and provide telephone networks for assistance and emergencies. The models will enable child care professionals to determine the best method of care and decide which programs to continue.[18]

Kansas was one of the first states to develop self-care training programs for latchkey children. Funded by the Family and Children's Trust Fund, a pilot program was established in 1980 to develop a curriculum for children and parents on safety, emergencies and care of siblings.[19]

In Maine, the Child Care Task Force conducted a telephone survey to determine the number of children actually taking care of themselves. Almost 19 percent of those between 6 and 12 spend some time on their own each week. The task force was set up in 1983 and charged with reviewing resources available for child care, determining the needs and number of children who need service and developing a statewide policy on child care.[20]

Oregon, Massachusetts and Connecticut have passed legislation allowing schools to be used for extended care programs.[21] Enabling legislation allows community groups which require facilities but no state funding to start programs. The Texas Department of Human Resources published a how-to manual for parents and community leaders on starting a school-age child care program.[22]

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Incentives For Employer-Sponsored Day Care

The child care tax credit is "the greatest amount of federal support for child care," according to Kathryn Senn Perry of the U.S. Department of Labor. About $1.7 billion will be provided by the federal government in tax credits in 1984. Credits are provided in four areas: (1) personal income tax credit; (2) business expense, allowing as deductions amounts paid to provide child care to employees; (3) child care provided by an employer not taxed as income to an employee (PL 97-34); (4) amortization of child care facilities supported by businesses.[23]

At least six states also have tax incentives for businesses providing child care services to employees:

- Arizona -- Employer child care facilities are deductible over 60 months instead of depreciated, and a 24-month amortization is allowed.
- California -- Certified public day care or pre-school centers, in employment centers, may be depreciated and amortized in 60 months. Also, child care payments, reimbursements and contributions are deductible.
- Connecticut -- Neighborhood Assistance Credit allows 30 percent of investment in day care facilities for employee use and 40 percent of the investment in non-profit day care facilities for employee use.
- New Mexico -- Corporate supported child care credit is allowed to an employer paying for child care services to dependents of employees during work hours, including employer operated child care facilities, up to 30 percent of cost for a maximum of $30,000.
- Ohio -- Urban jobs and enterprise zones programs pay for day care services ($300 maximum per child or dependent) for new employees.
- Pennsylvania -- Employment incentive payment credits are allowed as an added credit if the employer provides day care services for children of employees ($600 in first year, $500 in second, $400 in third).[24]

As another incentive, states may provide technical assistance to businesses interested in establishing day care programs for employees as New Jersey has done. North Carolina has developed a manual outlining the many child care options available to employers.[25]

"We have learned that many employers do not provide this service because they do not know of the alternatives available to them or because they are unaware of the many benefits that can accrue to the company through such a program. Since the project was initiated, the number of programs in our state has increased four-fold," Governor Thomas Kean of New Jersey told the U.S. House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families.[26]

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Child Care Programs For State Government Employees

A study by the National Employer Supported Child Care Project identified the following benefits to employers sponsoring day care programs:

- Lower job turnover.
- Lower absenteeism.
- Improved recruitment.
- Increased productivity.
- Enhanced company image.
- Improved morale.[27]

Types of Programs

Operating a day care center on site is widespread among employers. The employer operates the facility at the work site and provides financial support for both start-up and operating expenses. While this is one of the most expensive options, it has been very successful in private sector programs. One major advantage is that it allows employees greater contact with their children and their day care teachers. In some cases, employees pay fees for the use of the company day care facility.

For small agencies or companies, the idea may be adapted to provide an off-site center operated by a consortium for which the companies supply financial support to start the facility and provide technical assistance in its management. This type of facility has a broader base of users drawing from several employers, and is less likely to suffer from under use.

Child care reimbursement programs enable employers to support day care without developing costly centers. Under the vendor method, employers purchase enrollment in a licensed day care center and offer the slots to employees at a reduced cost. In some cases, the employer offers assistance, monetary or technical, to the existing day care centers in exchange for preferential treatment of their employees. In a voucher program, employees are either given coupons to redeem for day care services or increased pay to cover the cost of services. Since the employee is responsible for selecting the day care provider, administrative involvement is minimal for the employer.

In response to the demands of working parents, many companies have adopted more flexible personnel policies including flextime, job sharing and extended maternity, paternity and family leave. According to a benefits study by the Assembly of Governmental Employees, 37 states allow employees to take sick leave to care for ill family members.[28] Six states have passed legislation authorizing or encouraging the use of flextime and 35 additional states have one or more agencies using flextime, according to a report by the National Council for Alternative Work Patterns. Six states also have passed legislation permitting job sharing, according to the report.[29] By allowing working parents flexibility in scheduling the need for outside day care is often reduced.

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One of the newest forms of employer-supported child care programs is care for sick children. Availability of such programs can substantially reduce employee absenteeism. The average child is ill 10 days each year, often forcing parents to miss work.[30] Employers can make arrangements with special home day care facilities which serve sick children or provide special facilities adjacent to day care centers.

Employers also may provide educational programs for parents or referral services to assist parents in locating licensed day care programs. Information programs are a good first step for employers to show their interest in employees' child care problems. Referral service also enable employers to assess the need for establishing further programs.

State-Operated Day Care Programs

Three states -- New York, New Jersey and California -- support day care programs for their employees. New Jersey has a voucher program which has reduced costs and increased employee involvement. The state also is considering legislation requiring all new or renovated state buildings to have space for day care centers.[31] California is in the process of developing model programs with a $1 million fund established by the state for day care services for employees. According to Christine Powell, the project director, the program grew out of labor-management negotiations, and once management decided to support the project they decided to increase the funding over the amount requested by labor groups. Money for the program came "off the top" of funds allocated for salaries so, employees were not required to take pay cuts to fund the program. Ms. Powell said that the start-up fund worked out to about $8 per employee. The state has established a committee of labor and management to study alternatives and develop the program over the next three to four years, she said.[32]

In 1980, California passed legislation assuring the provision of space for child care in new state buildings housing 700 or more employees. Day care centers had to be established through employee initiative, and the space must be rented by the center. Several pilot programs have been operating in California hospitals since 1982, and both the Department of Motor Vehicles and Department of Transportation in Sacramento have operated day care centers.

New York has been the pioneer in establishing day care programs for employees' children. From 1972 to 1978 labor and management agreed to study day care programs, but no action was taken until 1979. In that year, joint labor-management committees were established to administer funds negotiated through the bargaining process. Grants of up to $10,000 came from a pool of $150,000 to provide money for equipment, supplies, insurance and salaries for day care centers.[33] Empire State Day Care Services, Inc. was created "to open and operate child care centers at state facilities throughout New York for the children of state employees." The corporation's primary purpose is to enable local groups to establish programs and protect the state from liability. All local centers are required to incorporate as private non-profit corporations, under the auspices of Empire State Day Care Services, Inc. Parents advisory groups become responsible for day-to-day oversight of the operating centers.[34]

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The Children's Place at the Plaza began operating in September 1979 and has become the standard model for state-operated day care programs. Staff members report being contacted by employees or officials from every state inquiring about the program.[35] The state of New York pays for the salary of the director, maintenance, space and utilities. Employees then pay low rates for the service. About 90 percent of the $260,000 budget comes from parents'fees. An evaluation of the center conducted by Welfare Research, Inc. in 1980, a year after the opening, showed that 62 percent of the parents using the center would have child care programs if Children's Place did not exist and 82 percent worried less about their children since they enrolled at the facility.[36]

Connecticut is considering two grant programs to establish day care programs for state agencies and non-profit organizations. Arizona is planning an on-site day care center for state employees' children adjacent to Capitol Mall. Illinois is considering a similar center. New Hampshire developed a pilot summer program for state employees' children located across from the state highway department.[37]

Summary

Through state-supported day care programs for employees' children, incentives for industry-supported programs and careful review of the regulation of child care providers, states are beginning to meet the growing demand for quality child care facilities.

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